DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 239 705 JC 840 085

AUTHOR Parker, Donald G.; Capella, Barry John
TITLE Esprit: A Humanities Magazine.
INSTITUTION New Mexico State Univ., Las Cruces. Dept. of Educational Specialties.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Financial Support; *Humanities; *Periodicals; State Programs; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Esprit (Journal)

ABSTRACT

In March 1984, the first issue of "Esprit," a semi-annual humanities magazine for the 56 two-year colleges in New York State, was published. The magazine seeks to confront the apparent decline of student interest in the humanities, community doubts about the relevance of the humanities, and the seeming indifference to the special truths inherent in and fostered by humanistic study. Its four basic purposes are to: (1) encourage aesthetic/humanistic communication among faculty and administrators at New York's two-year colleges; (2) provide an outlet for their creative and critical expression and promote it throughout the state; (3) explore the relevance and importance of humanities study to student preparation for careers in other programs and disciplines; and (4) dispense information on study in the humanities. "Esprit" seeks submissions in a variety of areas, including creative writing, art work, photography, critical essays, interviews, reviews, reports, calendar items, and bibliographies. After the magazine was conceptualized by staff members at Orange County Community College (OCCC), efforts to realize its publication included solicitation of support from other two-year colleges in the state, and largely unsuccessful attempts to obtain funding from corporations, businesses, and foundations. "Esprit" is currently financed to a large extent by OCCC and its association, and its editorial policy is determined by a Board of Advisory Educators from two-year colleges statewide. (HB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Parker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED239705

Department of English
Orange County Community College
SUNY
Middletown, New York 10940

ESPRIT: A Humanities Magazine

Donald G. Parker
Barry John Capella

In March of 1984 we published the first issue of a new semi-annual humanities magazine for the fifty-six two-year colleges of New York State. Its title, Esprit, of course means "spirit"; equally as important, it means "liveliness of mind and expression." We mean the title to refer, specifically, to the spirit of the Humanities and of humanistic study and, in general, to that sense of spirit which Pater speaks of in the "Conclusion" to his collection of essays entitled Studies in the History of the Renaissance. Is there a more impressive or inspiring statement of the need to keep one's spirit awake?

> ...The service of...speculative culture...towards the human spirit is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or sea is choicer than the rest; some mood or passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us--for that moment only. ...How may we see...all that is to be seen...by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?
>
> To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits.... While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a

JC840085

> lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment.... Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening.

This vivid apprehension of life that Pater so movingly describes, this awakening of the spirit and keeping it awake, is what, ideally, education in the Humanities is essentially about. But despite the obvious importance of humanistic study and sharing, the spirit of the Humanities is in trouble on many fronts; especially is this true on two-year college campuses. Esprit was founded, funded, and came to fruition to confront, indeed combat, the spirit's foes--and to enliven and encourage and help rearm humanistic patriots.

In the late spring of 1982, we found ourselves discussing--spiritedly-- the apparent decline of interest in the Humanities on the part of students, the waning of humanistic spirit within our colleagues, the doubt expressed in the community (in fact, in the nation) concerning the relevance of study in the Humanities, and the seeming indifference, culturally, to the special truths inherent in and fostered by humanistic study. More and more, the ominous rise and noise of a facile technological tide--accompanied by pseudo-mysterious murmurs of "software," "hardware," "floppy disks," "compatibility"-- were becoming oppressive, while awareness of the importance of the Humanities was eroding in an ever-more-powerful undertow. Clearly, something was wrong.

We wondered, therefore, what might be done to respond to this discouraging situation and to affect favorably, even redirect, the climate that threatened to prevail. It seemed that in terms of student cognizance (meaning what one is able to "know" and "understand" in the best sense) emphasis was increasingly being placed on the first syllable--the student as COG--rather than on an educative process that enhanced sensibility.

One way to fight back, we thought, would be to provide a forum for stimulating humanistic communication of various kinds--aesthetic, critical, theoretical, practical--thereby addressing the challenge directly. At first we considered

an in-house publication at OCCC for this purpose, believing that a revitalization of spirit and communication among the faculty and staff members would inevitably affect students positively. We were, in fact, dismayed to discover that all of us knew so little about each other's intellectual and aesthetic concerns and accomplishments.

Soon, however, determined to go further, we considered a humanities-oriented magazine for all two-year colleges in the state, assuming (correctly, as we later discovered) that many faculty and staff members elsewhere were feeling as dispirited as we. Thus, Esprit was born, its imaginative thrust deriving from two primary sources: (1) an awareness that the spirit of humanities education and communication is of vital importance to two-year colleges and (2) a belief that every effort must be made to preserve, protect, and enhance that spirit's viability and efficacy.

We decided that by publishing creative and critical writing and humanities-oriented essays by two-year college faculty and staff, as well as reproductions of paintings, drawings, sculpture, photographs, etc. by two-year college artists, and by disseminating humanistic information, Esprit would serve four basic purposes:

(1) encourage aesthetic/humanistic communication among the faculty and administrative staff members of New York State two-year colleges;

(2) provide an outlet for their creative and critical expression and promote it throughout the state;

(3) explore the relevance and importance of study in the humanities to student preparation for careers in other programs and disciplines;

(4) dispense a variety of information apropos of study in the humanities.

As symbol (and talisman) we chose the sculpted rendering of Laocoön in the Vatican Collection to visualize the struggle of the spirit of the Humanities writhing to free itself from various restrictive tentacles; these latter, to our minds, suggested the influences of numbing practicality, impersonal technological mechanism, and visionless political obduracy. Laocoön, we remembered, was the cautious Trojan who warned against gift-bearing Greeks

and who was suspicious of bringing the outwardly awesome technological achievement of the wooden horse (hollow at the core) into the Trojan inner sanctum.

We proceeded to write a four-page proposal for Esprit, including a statement of philosophy, a list of intentions, an editorial policy, and an outline of the projected scope. The magazine would seek submissions in the following categories:

* creative writing (poetry, short fiction, drama),

* art work (photographs of paintings, drawings, sculpture, etc.),

* photography,

* critical articles based in the humanities (vis-à-vis all areas of artistic expression),

* essays (other than pedagogical--and especially in reference to the value of study in the humanities for students preparing for careers in other areas),

* interviews (especially with New York State community college artists and writers),

* reviews of major relevant books, movies. plays, exhibits, concerts, etc., off-campus,

* reports on important seminars, conferences, etc.,

* calendar items in reference to humanities events,

* notes and queries,

* bibliography of recent community college faculty and administrative staff humanities-related publications, paper presentations, exhibits, etc.,

* forum for reader responses.

During the fall of 1982, this document in hand, we discussed Esprit with our department and division

chairpersons, the Dean of Academic Affairs, and the Dean of Student Affairs: all were enthusiastically receptive, offering constructive comments and both practical and philosophical support. Finally, after presenting our proposal in detail at department and division meetings, we felt confident enough to approach the college president for final approval.

Dr. Mary M. Norman delivered her inaugural address as the fourth president of Orange County Community College on October 18, 1982. The highlight of the speech was her strong commitment to the importance of humanities training for all students:

> Education must be multi-dimensional. ...Skills are not enough!
>
> Consider--to be a technically competent nurse, you must learn how to administer care, and how to do it well. Those of us involved in your education will train you well. However, it is not enough that you LEARN HOW TO ADMINISTER CARE to a patient, you must, at the same time, LEARN TO CARE ABOUT THE patient. Ah, there is the rub, the human dimension. Don't limit yourself to someTHING, a nurse: rather, expand to become someONE, a special nurse who cares for and about the patient.
>
> It is only through liberal and humanistic learning that this can occur. Remember, information is not knowledge; the skills that you learn today will be outdated in a very few years. But a liberal education will always be with you, or better, you with it.
>
> The question then is what should you do, what should you learn to become liberally educated? To begin with, you must open and stretch your mind to confront those issues which deal with being human.

It was not surprising, then, that when we proposed our project to Dr. Norman, she applauded our efforts to that point, put her experience and office behind Esprit, and made the difference that allowed the magazine to become a reality.

After others at Orange County Community College agreed that Esprit was needed for the faculty and administrative staff of the two-year colleges, we sent letters in the fall of 1982 to vice-presidents and deans statewide. Not only did we wish to publicize the purpose of the magazine, but we wanted to invite responses and suggestions from interested parties outside Orange County. In our letters we also asked the administrators to forward our letter to other individuals who might be sympathetic to our plan. The many responses that we received--often quite eloquent--provided the impetus for us to continue the campaign to make Esprit a viable publication. Our colleagues' letters not only contained messages of support for the venture, but concrete proposals--such as to make the magazine as representative of all two-year college faculty and administrative personnel as possible. The following excerpts typify the concerns, suggestions, and offers of support expressed statewide:

> I believe it is especially important that interest in the humanities be sustained and strengthened within the two-year college community. For some students, the two-year college represents their sole experience with higher education.... It is easy today, amid the frenetic pursuit of career-oriented courses and programs, for students to dismiss or lose sight of the less tangible, but no less important, values associated with the humanities, especially when educators obsessed with enrollment figures are quick to shortchange their own curricula.
>
> (Assistant Professor/English)

> Now more than ever before, community college faculty feel the need for linkage between the various campuses within the SUNY system.... Esprit promises to provide an appropriate professional vehicle to carry their commentaries, to showcase creative work, and to encourage an exchange of ideas between SUNY faculty.
>
> (Dean/Arts and Humanities Division)

> I want to offer my wholehearted support. Such a publication could, I believe, be a real source of intellectual and esthetic stimulation and exchange

> and would also assert the potential of community colleges to serve as creative and scholarly centers in their communities and in the State.
> (Chairman/Visual and Performing Arts)

> Any development of a vehicle for and about the Humanities should be supported. Putting the obvious budgetary trends aside, the mood of this country these past few years has led to the "training" of individuals under the guise of education. As I am sure you know, the nation is now beginning to recognize the need for broadly educated people. Since this recognition is coming from leaders of industry, it may provide an opportunity for people like yourselves to obtain fiscal (and moral) support.
> (Associate Dean/Liberal Arts and Science)

Next, we realized that--despite the overwhelming enthusiasm for the magazine-- fiscal support would determine whether our hopes for Esprit would be realized. Consequently, in the fall of 1982 we also sent letters to approximately 60 corporations and foundations, exploring the possibility of funding for the magazine. Most offered little encouragement and cited the following reasons:

1. They did not support publishing ventures.
2. Generally, they preferred not to fund new projects.
3. They did not fund two-year college projects.

Letters to local businesses and foundations produced the same results overall. Only Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc., donated funds.

In the spring of 1983, we faced a critical financial situation and decided to seek college support for the first issue. Fortunately, both Dr. Norman and the Dean of Student Affairs provided funding, from both the college itself and the Orange County Community College Association.

Once funding was secured, we mailed approximately 2,500 fliers--enclosed with letters to division and department chairmen, public relations directors, etc.--that stated our concern about the state of the humanities, our specific purpose for founding the magazine, and the types of submissions that we envisioned for the first issue. Dr.

Norman and the Vice-President of Administration greatly facilitated our task of corresponding statewide by providing funding for our training in word processing. To further publicize Esprit, we asked various journals and newsletters (such as PMLA and the NERC Newsletter) to include information about the magazine.

Finally, during the fall of 1983, after consulting the many letters and recommendations received advising us about Esprit, we formed a Board of Advisory Editors composed of thirteen members from two-year colleges statewide. (It was deemed especially important to make the Board representative from the very beginning and to plan to broaden the representation even further as the magazine evolved.) The extremely conscientious attitude and marked diligence of all Board members made editing and designing the inaugural issue of the magazine a distinct pleasure--not only were our spirits lifted by the imaginative and critical communication and by sharing a belief in the importance of the endeavor, but we were convinced that among Humanities faculty and administrators around the state, interest in and support for humanistic education had not really waned, that dedication and determination survived.

With the first issue of Esprit distributed throughout the state and with financial support secured for the second issue (scheduled for the fall of 1984), we are surprised to discover, looking back over the past two years, that we have no significant complaints to air. Instead, we feel thankful and gratified to have survived during such perilous times for aesthetic and humanistic endeavors. We have served as willing (even happy) mediums for creative and critical talent discovered to be solidly present at the crucial two-year college level. And in a sense we have both been and received the message: the tentacles of sterile technology (as proffered in a vacuum) and the hollow promises of its misguided apostles will not defeat modern Laocoöns. The spirit of the Humanities--the essence of education in the best sense--remains indomitable.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
ERIC® CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES
8118 MATH-SCIENCES BUILDING
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024

MAR 16 1984